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Opinion Revised

Hara Takashi's Views on Local Government

by Richard Staubitz

Because of the emphasis placed by historians on the struggles which attended the formation of central government policies and institutions in the early Meiji period, it is little realized that an equally important contest over state policy occurred at the level of local government organization. The degree to which local interests were to be subservient to national requirements in the course of Japan's modernization was one of the most seriously debated topics of the period. The Meiji political elite was agreed that Japan had to become a strong, unified state in order to resist the encroachment of the Western nations. But these same leaders were not always in agreement about how national unity or strength could be realized. Disagreement was particularly intense over the question of the desired balance between the newly established organs of national authority and local political units. The fundamental issue of the first decade of Meiji of whether Japan was to be a federal or unitary state was decided irrevocably in favor of the latter when imperial troops were victorious over the various samurai and peasant uprisings of the mid-1870s. But the basic question of how much authority could, or should, be given to local political units had been only partially resolved. During the second decade of Meiji the issue was manifested in the intense controversy over the issues of 'decentralization of authority'[1] and 'local self-government'.[2]

Adherents of the Popular Rights Movement,[3] as part of their strategy to force the government to widen popular participation in the national political process, became increasingly insistent after 1876 in their demands for greater local autonomy. Hara Takashi[4] in 1881, more than a decade before he became a party leader and cabinet minister, was a vigorous supporter of this position. As an editorialist for the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun*[5] at this time, he criticized the Meiji leaders

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[1] *chihō bunken* 地方分権
[2] *chihō jichi* 地方自治
[3] *jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動
[4] 原敬, 1856–1921.
[5] 郵便報知新聞

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for overcentralizing power and indiscriminately discarding the institutions of the old society. He advocated decentralizing power to the local levels and giving the prefectural assemblies wider political authority to determine local issues and to supervise their execution. However, by the mid-1880s he had dramatically reversed his opinion in favor of a more centralized approach to local government.

An unpublished memorandum by Hara to Inoue Kaoru,[6] the importance of which has not been previously recognized, reveals that Hara had become convinced by the mid-1880s of the need to use the power of the state positively to promote national development, and he advocated a centralized approach to local government to achieve this end. This document revealing the extent of the change in Hara's outlook is important for understanding the uncertainty in the minds of Meiji political leaders as they grappled with the question of how state power should be used to transform Japan into a modern nation. At the same time, it sheds new light upon Hara's political thought and his policies in the early twentieth century as a political party leader and as a minister of state.

In the decade following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 the leaders of the new imperial government adopted two radically different approaches to local administration. During the first phase, 1868–78, they followed a policy of centralizing both authority and function in the state. At the national level, the daimyo, the former feudal lords, were persuaded to surrender their domains to the emperor as the sovereign authority, and then the domains were abolished and a uniform prefectural system was established. Governors were appointed by the emperor through his ministers, and the prefectural bureaucracy increasingly came under central regulation. At the local level of town and village, the government sought to disregard the traditional village as an administrative unit and create instead a structure of local administration based on a pyramid of artificially drawn geographical subdivisions, each with its own superior official appointed by the central authorities.[7]

In 1878 the Meiji leaders abandoned this approach to local administration in favor of a more decentralized one. By 1877 they had seen sufficient to conclude that the experiment with administrative centralization had been a failure. There had been extensive opposition at the local level. Peasant disturbances increased in number and intensity. The samurai rebellions of the 1870s were in substantial part directed against this centralizing effort. The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877 led by Saigō Takamori[8] was the last and most serious of these. Its suppression ended the threat of secessionist movements, but resentment still lingered. With the threat of armed conflict removed, the Meiji leaders could consider

[6] 井上馨

[7] See Kikegawa Hiroshi 亀卦川浩, *Meiji Chihō Jichi Seido no Seiritsu Katei* 明治地方自治制度の成立過程, Tōkyō Shisei Chōsakai, 1955; Richard Staubitz, 'The Establishment of the System of Local Self-Government (1888–1890) in Meiji Japan: Yamagata Aritomo and the Meaning of "Jichi" (Self-Government)', Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1973, pp. 13–20.

[8] 西郷隆盛

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methods to reduce further local unrest. They did so by means of returning to the villages a certain degree of control over their own affairs.

But it was not just expediency that urged this change of policy. An even more important consideration was the growing realization by many Meiji leaders, particularly Kido Kōin,[9] that some form of local self-government was essential to the future political development of Japan.[10] This line of thought emerged as a result of the investigation of Western political systems undertaken by these leaders, an investigation which convinced them of the need to introduce constitutional government. They concluded as well that any constitutional system for Japan should be based upon a system of administration in which the local community had the initiative to handle its own affairs. As a result of this conviction, the Meiji leaders introduced in 1878 the series of laws known as the Three New Laws.[11] These new laws, actually four in number, provided for a return to the traditional *mura* (village) and *gun* (district) as the basic unit of local administration, the formation of prefectural and village assemblies possessing the authority to deliberate on local budgets, and the public election of village officials.[12]

The Three New Laws were an important turning point in the institutional history of modern Japan. With their promulgation the Meiji leaders rejected explicitly the principle of administrative centralization for local government. But the Three New Laws had not resolved fully the question of how much power the state should permit local organs of government to possess. Many were convinced of the need to further decentralize administration until local units had the authority both to determine policy relating to regional affairs and to supervise its implementation;[13] many others believed central authority had been dangerously weakened by the powers already conceded to local assemblies and felt these should be reassumed by central authorities.[14] As the Meiji leaders struggled with the problem of how to relate decentralization of authority and administration within the imperial system they hoped to construct, supporters of the popular rights movement sought to gain acceptance for the idea of local self-government as the basis for a wholly different type of political organization for the state than that envisioned by the ministers in Tokyo.

[9] 木戸孝允

[10] Staubitz, pp. 20–30.

[11] *San Shimpō* 三新法. Kikegawa, pp. 60–95; Staubitz, pp. 30–3.

[12] Imperial Decrees 17, 18 & 19, issued in July 1878, promulgated the Law for Reorganization of Districts, Wards, Towns and Villages, Regulations for Prefectural Assemblies, and Regulations for Local Taxes. The Law Regarding Ward, Town and Village Assemblies was promulgated two years later in April 1880. Translations of these laws are contained in W. W. McLaren, ed., *Japanese Government Documents, 1867–1889*, in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, vol. 42, part 1, 1914.

[13] See, for example, the arguments of Ōmori Shōichi in his introduction to his translation of the French Local Government Codes of 1852, 1861, 1866–7, 1871 & 1875, in *Fukkoku Chihō Bunken Hō* 仏国地方分権法, Hakubunsha, 1878. For an interpretation of Ōmori's opinions at this time, see Staubitz, pp. 58–9, 63 & 141–2.

[14] See Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視, '*Gushi Fukenkai Chūshi no Ikensho wo Sanjō Sanetomi ni Shimesu Koto*' 具視府県会中止の意見書を三条実美に示す事, in *Iwakura Kō Jikki* 岩倉公実記, Iwakura Kō Kyūseki Hozonkai, 1927, III, pp. 944–53.

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All opposition to the Meiji leaders and their policies in the mid-1870s had not, of course, taken the form of armed insurrection or popular disturbance. Instead of resorting to military means, many, such as Itagaki Taisuke[15] and his followers, sought to issue their challenge through political action: demands for popular rights and representative government became the rallying cry for such dissidents, and Itagaki's *Risshisha*[16] the model for political associations. The defeat of Saigō's rebellion demonstrated the futility of armed uprising and made clear that peaceful opposition through political organization was the only possible way to obtain wider participation in the national political process. After 1877 agitation for representative institutions intensified, and political organizations became more widespread and sophisticated in structure. At the same time, a new dimension was added to the demands of the popular rights movement, for the issue of greater local autonomy had become inseparably linked to that of constitutional government and the opening of a national assembly.[17]

This added dimension was reflected first in the memorial presented by the *Risshisha* to the emperor in June 1877, renewing its call for the establishment of a representative assembly. In it the *Risshisha* specifically criticized what it believed to be excessive centralization of power as detrimental to the political development of the nation. The memorial demanded, in addition to adopting decisions by popular opinion and nourishing the independence of the people, the decentralization of administration so that officials could decide matters of local interest without reference to the central level.[18] Similar views were contained in the 1878 prospectus of the *Aikokusha*,[19] which *Risshisha* leaders were attempting to revive in order to carry the popular rights movement to all areas of the country.[20]

The belief that national wealth and strength depended upon the well-being of the regions and that decentralization of political authority was the means of achieving this commanded considerable public sympathy. As political agitation for a national assembly grew more intense, cries for a greater degree of local autonomy than that provided by the Three New Laws appeared with increasing frequency in editorials of both national and regional newspapers. At first they lacked focus and were limited to the generally expressed belief, as in the case of the *Risshisha* memorial, in the desirability of greater decentralization of authority by the government. But gradually the demands became more specific, and by 1881 these editorials focused particularly on the necessity of widening the political authority of the prefectural assemblies. A typical example of the arguments put forward at this time was Hara Takashi's editorial in the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun* of 27 April 1881 entitled '*Chihō Bunken Ron*' ('An Argument for Local Decentralization of Authority').

[15] 板垣退助
[16] 立志社
[17] Haraguchi Kiyoshi 原口清, *Meiji Zenki Chihō Seijishi Kenkyū* 明治前期地方政治史研究, Hanawa Shobō, 1974, II, p. 33.
[18] 'Memorial Advocating the Establishment of a Representative Assembly', in McLaren, pp. 465–7.
[19] 愛国社
[20] Haraguchi, p. 33.

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Hara opened his editorial by noting that, although a decentralized system of local administration had long been advocated for Japan, 'there is as yet no true decentralization in the regions.'[21] He was quite specific about what constituted truly decentralized local government. It did not mean giving the bureaucracy greater discretion in implementing the regional policies of the central authorities. Rather, Hara wrote, 'The meaning of local decentralization of authority is that the local assembly is given significant authority; it does not mean that the preponderance of authority is given to the local government bureaucracy.[22] If this local bureaucracy is given all of the power and the local assembly none, then this is not true decentralization of authority.'[23] The contemporary reality in Japan, Hara believed, was that the regional bureaucracy, not the assembly, decided local matters.

With the promulgation of the Three New Laws, according to Hara, the Meiji leaders had conceded the desirability of giving local political units a greater voice in deciding communal issues. But although prefectural and village assemblies had been established, they had not been endowed with real political power. Priorities of local administration were still determined by the central government and its officials, and not by the residents themselves; the authority of the assemblies was passive and limited to consultation and deliberation on the budget. Execution of administration was still in the hands of government bureaucrats—officials of the central government—who often discharged their responsibilities high-handedly and arbitrarily. In any confrontation between the assembly and the bureaucracy, the latter had the preponderance of real power.[24]

Unless this situation was reversed, Hara contended, and the assemblies, rather than the central government, were given the political authority to decide matters relating to their areas and to supervise the carrying out of the wishes of the inhabitants by the bureaucracy, the regions would never prosper. Hara concluded that for Japan to become truly strong it was necessary to decentralize political authority to the regions to the extent that local assemblies had both legislative and executive authority for matters pertaining to their areas.[25]

Hara saw no reason why the kind of system he advocated could not be introduced in Japan immediately. He could not accept as valid the arguments of critics that the political authority of the prefectural assemblies should not be expanded because of structural weaknesses of the Prefectural Assembly Law. He singled out as particularly specious the argument that the assemblies could not be given greater political power because the narrow suffrage made it difficult to obtain men of talent. Hara did not dispute that defects existed. Rather, he pointed out that such weaknesses could be corrected easily by either amending or rewriting the laws. The real reason why true decentralization of authority had

[21] Hara Takashi, '*Chihō Bunken Ron*' 地方分権論, in Tanaka Asakichi 田中朝吉, ed., *Hara Takashi Zenshū*, Hara Takashi Zenshū Kankōkai, 1929, I, p. 29.

[22] *chihō seifu* 地方政府

[23] Ibid., p. 29.

[24] Ibid., p. 29.

[25] Ibid., pp. 29–30.

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not occurred, Hara contended, was not that it was impossible but that the government did not wish to introduce such a system. However, he concluded, it was necessary for the government to do so immediately. For only if it changed its policy toward local administration and gave extensive power to the prefectural assemblies and truly decentralized authority to the regions would the nation prosper.[26]

What Hara was advocating in 1881 was not a system in which the central government allowed its officials the discretion to adapt its directives to regional conditions. He was demanding a system of self-government in which assemblies had the authority to take the initiative in deciding local issues and to implement their decisions. By the mid-1880s, however, Hara had abandoned this position. The extent to which Hara had reversed his earlier position is revealed in a lengthy opinion written to Inoue Kaoru entitled '*Hibunken Ron*' ('An Argument Against Decentralization of Authority').[27] He wrote:

> If we want to give reality to the idea of local decentralization of authority in Japan at this time we must give considerable power to the prefectural assemblies. Not only must the prefectural assemblies have the right to debate local taxes but we must also grant true local self-government and establish an appropriate system which will preserve the peace of the local regions and realize its true welfare. *However, as to the question of whether it is appropriate to give such extensive authority to the present prefectural assemblies, I believe that it would not be appropriate at all.*[28]

The circumstances surrounding the composition of this document cannot be determined. There is no reference to it in Hara's diary, but internal evidence suggests that it was written in the mid-1880s. A plausible explanation why Hara wrote it is suggested by Inoue's interests at this time. According to his biography, Inoue had become a strong supporter of the idea of a system of local self-government, which he only vaguely defined at this time, for Japan during his first tenure as Foreign Minister. Inoue's appointment as Foreign Minister had coincided with the period of increased political party activity and agitation. He came to believe as a result of his experiences as a cabinet minister that a greater participatory role in local administration would ensure cooperation between the people and the government. To promote such a system he had sought to gather about him men with similar ideas.[29] Hara had entered the Foreign Ministry in November 1882, and it seems quite probable that, given Hara's earlier views supporting local decentralization of authority, Inoue would have solicited his opinion.[30]

[26] Ibid., p. 33.

[27] The manuscript is contained in the *Inoue Kaoru Monjo* 井上馨文書 of the *Kensei Shiryō Shitsu* 憲政資料室 of the National Diet Library, Tokyo. I am greatly indebted to Hirose Yoshihiro 広瀬順晧 of the *Kensei Shiryō Shitsu* staff for bringing this document to my attention. The manuscript is unpaginated, and unless otherwise noted all quotations below have been taken from it.

[28] Emphasis in the original.

[29] *Segai Inoue Kō Den* 世外井上公伝, Nagai Shoseki, 1934, IV, pp. 52–3.

[30] For details concerning Hara's career at this time, see Maeda Renzan 前田蓮山, *Hara Takashi Den* 原敬伝, Takayama Shoin, 1943,

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But even though we do not know the exact circumstances in which Hara wrote this document, he leaves little doubt as to what led him to change his opinion. He explained in his introduction: 'A few years ago I accepted the idea of local decentralization of authority and was an ardent advocate of it. However, in 1881 I toured the country and observed local conditions, and now I believe my previous opinion was mistaken.' On 2 May 1881, less than a week after writing his editorial advocating a decentralized system of local government for Japan, Hara set out with two other staff members of the *Yūbin Hōchi Shimbun* on a seven-month tour to gather first-hand information about conditions in the regions, and to observe the impact of the central government's policies on local society. This was a welcome opportunity for him. As he noted in the introduction to the diary of his trip, there were few persons at the central level who had any direct knowledge of the extent of the changes which had taken place at the local level since the Meiji Restoration.[31] What Hara expected to discover when he set out on his investigatory tour can only be conjectured. But as the above quotation clearly reveals, his impressions of local political conditions were quite unfavorable.

Particularly shocking to Hara was the chaotic political situation within the prefectural assemblies, which, it must be remembered, he had suggested earlier should be given greater political authority in order to realize true local self-government in Japan. He presents a list of problems which he observed in the assemblies, the most serious of which were their time-consuming, costly and unproductive debates; the antagonism and confrontation between the assemblies and the prefectural bureaucracy; and the turning of the assemblies into forums for the discussion of national political issues and popular rights theories.

Present-day historians of Meiji Japan have come to conclude that the prefectural assemblies of the 1880s played a positive role in the political development of modern Japan. They stress the value of the political experience gained by local political leaders through debates in the assemblies and confrontations with the bureaucracy as contributing to the success of constitutional government in the post-1890 period.[32] They point to the integrative features of the prefectural system which brought newly emergent local elites into the national political framework as contributing to the harmonious transformation of Meiji political society.[33]

Hara, a contemporary, would not have agreed with this reassessment. 'Can,' he asked rhetorically in his memorandum, 'the present prefectural assemblies truly be said to be promoting the welfare of the local areas? Can they be said to be giving serious attention to legislative matters?' To his mind the answer was a resounding 'No.' Hara did not deny the assemblies' right to debate local issues or

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vol. 1; also, Peter Duus, *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taishō Japan*, Harvard U.P., 1968, pp. 68–74.

[31] Hara Takashi, '*Kaidai Shūyū Nikki*' 海内周遊日記, in *Zenshū*, I, pp. 45–6.

[32] See George Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868–1900*, Harvard U.P., 1967, pp. 82–3.

[33] See James L. McClain, 'Local Politics and National Integration: The Fukui Prefectural Assembly in the 1880s', in *MN*, XXXI, 1976, pp. 51–75.

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to determine such matters as the expenditure of local taxes. In fact, this was their legitimate business. But, according to Hara, when they allowed their debates on national issues and popular rights theories to interfere with their proper legislative duties concerning local finances, they acted irresponsibly. Similarly, he believed, these assemblies acted irresponsibly when they called for reduction of expenses which impaired administration or when they tolerated corruption in local politics.

Although, Hara wrote, he took no pleasure in pointing out the defects of the prefectural assemblies, the situation had degenerated too far to be ignored. For, 'when the prefectural assembly does not attend properly to legislative matters and ignores the welfare of the region, not only does it harm the region but it also undermines the spirit of local self-government.' Hara found it especially ironical that those very persons who were calling most vociferously for increased decentralization of authority to the regions were by their actions undermining the spirit of local self-government. He commented:

> How can one remain silent when the prefectural assemblies in their present condition themselves demand local decentralization of authority? If the prefectural assemblies desire decentralization, they must debate matters with complete attention to achieving the welfare of the area and in accordance with a responsible spirit of self-government. How in the world can these men ask for local decentralization of authority when they disregard the welfare of the local area and uselessly indulge in empty theorizing? If the present local assemblies are given extensive power and responsibility, will it be any different from putting a sharp knife in the hands of a child?

Hara was not alone in his criticisms of the conduct of the prefectural assemblies. A similar disenchantment with the contemporary situation in the assemblies was experienced by Ōmori Shōichi,[34] another early advocate of greater local decentralization of authority. Ōmori, an aide of Yamagata Aritomo[35] instrumental in introducing the System of Local Self-Government[36] in 1888–90, was sent by the government in 1882 to investigate political conditions in the assemblies of the provinces lying along the Tōkaidō route.[37] In his report to Yamagata, then chairman of the *Sangi-in*,[38] Ōmori expressed his concern about the tumultuous political debates within the assemblies concerning national political issues and the frequent confrontations between the assemblies and the prefectural bureaucracy.[39] But although Ōmori and Hara agreed that the situation in the assemblies was deplorable, they disagreed about the causes of the problem and the means for remedying it.

[34] 大森鐘一
[35] 山県有朋
[36] *chihō jichi seido* 地方自治制度
[37] Details in Staubitz, pp. 58–60.
[38] 参議院
[39] Ōmori Shōichi, '*Chihō Gikai ni kansuru Ikensho*' 地方議会に関する意見書, manuscript in *Ōmori Shōichi Monjo*, Tōkyō Shisei Chōsakai 東京市政調査会.

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For Ōmori, the deterioration of political conditions in the assemblies was a temporary phenomenon: it reflected the diffusion to the local level of the debates and struggles over national political issues which had resulted in the ouster of Ōkuma Shigenobu[40] in 1881 from the government and the emperor's subsequent promise of a national assembly. Because Ōmori believed this disorderly condition was only a temporary aberration, he recommended in his report against significantly altering the Prefectural Assembly Law and reinstating a centralized system of local administration, a change which many within the government were advocating at that time. After these temporarily unsettled conditions returned to normal, he suggested, it would be possible once again to resume the process of decentralization of authority begun by the Three New Laws until an appropriate system of local self-government was achieved.

For Hara, however, the problem had a far more profound cause, one which he believed made inappropriate any further move by the government to decentralize authority to the regions. The many abuses which he observed in the assemblies, Hara concluded, had their origin in the persistence of feudal customs and perspectives at the local levels of society. He found in his travels that, although Japan had developed considerably and had adopted numerous 'enlightened practices' since the Meiji Restoration, 'feudal customs' had not yet been completely eliminated. This was particularly true in the regions where people still clung to their old customs and habits of thought, by which he meant primarily sectionalism and parochialism. Whereas in his *Hōchi* editorials Hara had protested the government's ruthless efforts to eliminate the practices of the traditional order, he now asked:

> Should these harmful customs be allowed to continue? Should these habits be protected? If they should be preserved, then we must have an appropriate system to ensure this, and a system of decentralized political authority will be just the thing needed. However, can there be anyone foolish enough to desire this?

Hara contended that those in the prefectural assemblies who demanded greater decentralization did so not out of a desire to promote national development. Rather, they sought by their call for greater local autonomy to recover from the central government sufficient political control over legislation affecting their regions to maintain the traditional social order. Although they justified their demands for decentralization of authority by reference to Western theories of natural rights, in fact their own theory of decentralization of political authority 'is a reactionary[41] doctrine. Those who argue in this manner twist the theory of local self-government to aid the ideas of conservatism and reaction and strengthen their foundations.' This pernicious blend of feudal outlook and radical theory, Hara felt, made a system of local self-government of the sort advocated by adherents of the popular rights movement too dangerous for Japan. He opposed

[40] 大隈重信 [41] *taishu* 退守

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decentralization of authority because 'even if we thought that decentralization of the sort recommended by its advocates could really be introduced, feudal customs and practices would flare up again and gain new vigor, and disorder would spread throughout the country. How can this be the way to strengthen the nation or contribute to its prosperity and welfare?' To be blunt, he continued, 'if such a system were implemented, it would retard the enlightenment and development[42] of our country and hamper the dissemination of laws,[43] and would in the end give rise to internal disorder.'

Few among the advocates of greater decentralization of authority, Hara believed, truly understood the implications of their demands. According to him, the extreme degree to which adherents of the popular rights movement wanted to divide the power of the government and delegate it to the prefectures would mean the creation of independent states within the larger state. As he interpreted their arguments, each unit would have its own power to make laws and decide on such matters as war and peace, and as a result the unity of the state would be lost. To him, their interpretation of the meaning of decentralization of authority could be identified with separatism or feudalism. Whether or not they admitted it, 'those who advocate decentralization advocate the type of decentralized system found in foreign countries, which they want to copy without careful thought.' What they hoped to achieve by decentralizing authority was to establish immediately a federal system of government similar to that of the United States of America. Such blind imitation of another country's political institutions, without any reference to actual conditions within either country, was, he felt, the greatest misfortune which could befall a nation. For this reason, Hara opposed such radical theories, 'whose poison is worse than that of a venomous insect.'

Hara recognized that under certain historical circumstances a federal form of political organization was natural for a nation. When there were significant differences of race, language, custom or other circumstances within the nation, federalism was unavoidable. In general, he noted, 'those countries where there is significant decentralization are countries which are formed from their constituent parts,[44] rather than those which have had government imposed from the center.' To illustrate his point Hara chose the example of the United States of America, and sought to explain 'why the system which naturally emerged in the United States was decentralized government formed from its constituent parts.' After tracing the origins and histories of the New England colonies, he concluded:

> Because at various times the competing nations of Europe sent their citizens to colonize [North America] and to introduce their own customs, a natural form of local self-government[45] came into being. Therefore local government[46]

[42] *kaimei* 開明
[43] *seirei no fukyū* 政令の普及
[44] Literally, 'countries made up from the regions': *chihō yori naritachitaru kuni* 地方より成立たる国.
[45] *shizen chihō no jichi* 自然地方の自治
[46] *chihō seifu* 地方政府

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was established first and then the central government. There can be no doubt that such a form of decentralization will flourish.

But although Hara accepted that there were cases in which a system of decentralization of authority was inevitable, this did not mean that it was desirable. 'It cannot be said,' he wrote, 'that centralized authority necessarily means strength and decentralized authority necessarily means weakness. But, except in those situations in which a decentralized system is natural, if authority is not centralized a country cannot achieve wealth and strength.' This, Hara felt, was demonstrated clearly by the case of Germany. After that country had been unified and the Empire replaced the Federation, its wealth and strength doubled as the government gradually eliminated the evils caused by decentralization. Hara argued, 'Germany was not a [naturally] decentralized country but one made of many parts. Because it wanted wealth and power it had to overcome the evils of decentralization.' If the government's present policy were to be suspended temporarily and a policy of decentralization of authority followed, Hara had no doubt that the German Empire would fall into chaos and its wealth and strength would disappear. If this were true for Germany, which had a tradition of decentralization of authority, how much more would it be true for a country such as Japan, he asked.

Japan, Hara contended, throughout her history had had no system of decentralized authority comparable to that found in the United States of America or other federal states.[47] Rather, 'From the past the central government has ruled over the local regions.' The Emperor Jimmu's eastern expedition and the Emperor Tenji's establishment of the *gun-ken* (district and province) system had created a system in which political authority was centralized, a system which was well suited to national conditions in Japan and congenial to the national character. As a result the country was unified and well governed, and the people experienced peace and prosperity. During the feudal period the unitary nature of the state was partially lost as political power devolved to the warrior class, a process disastrous to the happiness and welfare of the nation. Fortunately this temporary aberration had been rectified after the fall of the Tokugawa regime; because the Meiji government had followed a unifying policy after the Restoration, feudal customs and habits of thought had been substantially eliminated and the 'people awakened from their long slumber.' But if the government reinstituted a system of decentralized political authority of the type demanded by popular rights advocates, Hara argued, 'these evil customs and habits will continue and the government's long-range policies will be undermined.'

In Hara's view decentralization of authority was unsuitable for Japan not only because of its history but also because of the circumstances of its people. Differences of race, language, custom or natural geographic boundaries might make decentralization inevitable, but none of these pertained to Japan. For in the

[47] *rempō no kuni* 連邦の国

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manner of a single family, Hara contended, Japan was homogeneous as to race, language and custom. Similarly, although public communications had not yet been fully developed, sufficient progress had been made to ensure that the government's policies would be implemented uniformly throughout the country. Because decentralization of authority was not inherent in Japan's heritage, its introduction at this time would only strengthen the feudal tradition of particularism and retard the enlightenment and development of the nation.

Sectionalism and provincialism, the legacy of the feudal past, permeated all aspects of local political and economic activity, Hara maintained. To illustrate the consequences of such 'smallness of spirit' within the prefectural assembly, he used the example of the constant conflict which he observed in the assemblies over public works construction. According to Hara, when a construction project debated by an assembly benefited, however slightly, one area more than another, the resulting controversy was so extreme as to prevent rational debate. Or, at a more general level, when Prefecture A wanted to construct a levee or road which required cooperation from neighboring Prefecture B, it was often unable to obtain the necessary cooperation because it would benefit Prefecture B somewhat less than Prefecture A. For Hara, both situations had the same cause: members of the assemblies were accustomed to think only of local, particular interests and not of the general public interest.[48] So serious had the situation become in Hara's view that unless the government resumed responsibility for the construction and upkeep of public works, which had been delegated to the local assembly by the Prefectural Assembly Law, such projects would quickly fall into decay.

Hara singled out the case of public works because of the importance he attached to the development of transportation and communications in the modernization process. To him, 'neither the enactment of laws by the government nor the promotion of enlightened practices are so important as convenience of public transportation.' In France, according to Hara, the upkeep of public roads had been essential to the development of the state, and for Japan, where as a result of the feudal legacy 'roads which can hardly be called roads are numerous,' the need to establish a national highway network was even more imperative. 'It is indisputable,' he concluded, 'that government laws promoting the development of public communication and transportation should be used to advance human knowledge, and we must not hesitate to take advantage of this and develop it to the maximum.'

In a similar manner, Hara attributed the inability of early Meiji political parties to coalesce into effective, nation-wide organizations to the persistence of feudal modes of thought and behavior in the modern period. The reason why men who claimed to hold the same principles were unable to combine and form political organizations when the slightest difference of opinion occurred was not a result of an irrational insistence on ideological purity by party leaders. Rather, it

[48] *ippan no kōeki* 一般の公益

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reflected the persistence of sectionalism and particularism at all levels of local society.

Such examples of parochial perspectives were not limited to party or local political leaders. Local government officials, too, Hara suggested, were affected by this same parochialism. As an example he pointed to the recurring problem of local government officials' attempts to promote economic enterprises unsuited to the particular conditions of the area. Such attempts undermined the traditional economic activities of the area and caused considerable hardship to the people. Although some might argue that such cases were the result of the unwitting zeal of local government officials anxious to stimulate economic development, Hara wrote, the cause was in fact more fundamental. Rather, he thought, it was the autarkic policy of the feudal lord who sought to produce everything within the borders of his domain and to discourage interdomainal trade. However, according to Hara, the extensive development of nation-wide public transportation and communication no longer made it necessary to impose upon the people the hardships caused by such policies. Nevertheless, such practices persisted and were evidence, Hara believed, of the continued pervasiveness of sectionalist habits of thought at the local level.

For Hara the lesson to be drawn from these examples was unequivocal. His identification of sectionalism and particularism as the cause of the many ills affecting local society, including political conflict, was not simply an analytical exercise. It was clear to him that unless this legacy of the feudal past was extirpated the nation would never prosper. A decentralized approach to local government organization would only retard the realization of the Restoration goals of enlightenment and progress for Japan. The only true way to achieve national wealth and strength, to use Hara's words, was 'to make the entire country into one family.' He had become convinced that the power of the state had to be used positively and dynamically to promote national development.

What is especially significant about the perspectives expressed in '*Hibunken Ron*' is the extent to which they foreshadow, and help to explain, Hara's later policies as a political party leader and minister of state. A common evaluation of Hara is that he 'was not creative; he was not a political leader with great vision.'[49] According to this view, Hara's so-called positive economic policies, which emphasized the need to develop roads, river and harbor facilities, and railroads, were determined primarily by his desire to expand the influence of his party, the *Seiyūkai*,[50] in the national political system by the use of 'pork-barrel' techniques at the local level.[51] A similar motivation is seen to lie behind his attempts to reform the System of Local Self-Government which Yamagata Aritomo established in 1888–90 by abolishing the district (*gun*) system. By eliminating the district as a self-governing unit, it has been suggested, Hara intended that the prefectural

[49] Tetsuo Najita, *Hara Kei in the Politics of Compromise, 1905–1915*, Harvard U.P., 1967, p. 220.

[50] 政友会

[51] Ibid., pp. 50–79 & 220–1.

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bureaucracy would become the means for making local government officials more responsive to the requirement of local party branch offices than to town or village councils.[52] Thus, it is said, Hara believed that a more centralized approach to local government organization would enable the political parties to extend their political power when they gained appointment to ministerial positions.

There is, of course, considerable truth in this interpretation of Hara and his policies. However, Hara's '*Hibunken Ron*' shows that there was a greater consistency and a more profound vision underlying these policies than is generally recognized. We need not necessarily agree with him about the extent and cause of political disorder within the prefectural assemblies in the 1880s or his historical analysis of the nature of Japan's ancient polity to appreciate that his later policies reflected a clearly perceived need as to how Japan should modernize. As revealed in his '*Hibunken Ron*', Hara rejected a decentralized approach to governmental organization in favor of a more centralized one; he preferred a dynamic rather than a passive use of state power to transform Japan into a modern, progressive nation state. This same perspective pervaded as well his later political and governmental policies.

[52] Ibid., pp. 45–50.

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